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ALFRED TENNYSON,

POET LAUREATE.

BY

T. H. REARDEN.

"Mein Lied ertönt der unbekannten Menge;
Ihr Beifall selbst macht meinem Herzen bang."

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SAN FRANCISCO, 1883.

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CHRONOLOGY

OF LITERATURE AND POLITICS,

PREPARED WITH REFERENCE TO THE BIOGRAPHY OF ALFRED TENNYSON.

1809. August 5. ALFRED TENNYSON BORN.

In the same year were born William E. Gladstone, Cardinal Manning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1807?), Charles R. Darwin, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Stuart Blackie, Edgar Allen Poe, Lord Houghton (R. Monckton Milnes), Bishop Selwyn.

Within the century, and to be regarded as contemporaries, were born Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800), George Bancroft (1800), Edgar Bouverie Pusey (1800), John Henry Newman (1801), Hugh Miller (1802), Harriet Martineau (1802), Victor Hugo (1802), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804), John Frederick Denison Maurice (1805), Bulwer-Lytton (1805), Benjamin Disraeli (1805), John Sterling (1806), John Stuart Mill (1806), John Greenleaf Whittier (1807), Richard Chenevix Trench (1807), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807), Charles Tennyson Turner (1808).

Within the decade succeeding Tennyson's birth were born Henry Alford (1810), Alfred de Musset (1810), Arthur Henry Hallam (February, 1811), William Makepeace Thackeray (1811), Robert Lowe (1811), John Bright (1811), Robert Browning (1812), Charles Dickens (1812), Norman Macleod (1812), Charles Reade (1814),

Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815), Anthony Trollope (1815), Charlotte Bronte (1816), Tom Taylor (1817), James Anthony Froude (*circa* 1818), HER MAJESTY QUEEN VICTORIA (1819), PRINCE ALBERT (1819), Charles Kingsley (1819), James Russell Lowell (1819), John Ruskin (1819), Herbert Spencer (1820), John Tyndall (1820), Florence Nightingale (1820).

1821. Death of John Keats (born 1795).
Bishop Temple (Essays and Reviews) born.

1822. Death of Percy Bysshe Shelley (born 1792).
Alfred Tennyson writes a MS. tale.

1824. Death of Lord Byron (born 1788).

1825. Thomas Henry Huxley born.

1827. Death of Ugo Foscolo (born 1775).
"POEMS BY TWO BROTHERS" published May 19. First contemporary criticism of the Poems appeared in "The Literary Chronicle."

1828. Death of Canning.
Alfred Tennyson writes "The Lover's Tale" (not printed till 1833).
The poet takes up his residence at Cambridge (Trinity College).
THE POEM "TIMBUCTOO" GAINS THE CHANCELLOR'S MEDAL.
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI born.

1829. Catholic Relief Bill passed.

1830. "POEMS CHIEFLY LYRICAL" published.
John Stuart Mill writes a favorable criticism on.

1831. Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, the poet's father, dies.
The present Lord Lytton (Owen Meredith) born.
A poem by Tennyson appears in "The Gem."

1832. Reform Bill passed.
January. Arthur Hallam leaves Cambridge.
Wilson (Kit North) publishes a review of Tennyson in Blackwood.
Death of Sir Walter Scott (born 1771).

Tennyson publishes sonnets in "The Yorkshire Literary Annual," and in "Friendship's Offering"; a sonnet published by Edward Tennyson.

1832–3. SECOND VOLUME of Alfred Tennyson's poems published by Moxon.

1833. Sept. 15. ARTHUR HENRY HALLAM DIES AT VIENNA.

1834. Death of Coleridge (born 1772).

January 3. Hallam buried at Clevedon Church, Somersetshire.

1837. HER MAJESTY QUEEN VICTORIA ASCENDS THE THRONE.

Alfred Tennyson resident at Caistor, Lincolnshire, where an uncle was vicar.

"St. Agnes" published in "The Keepsake."

The lines in Maud, "O that 'twere possible," published in "The Tribute."

1840. Marriage of Queen Victoria with Prince Albert.

1841. BIRTH OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

1842. POEMS BY ALFRED TENNYSON IN TWO VOLUMES published.

1843. DEATH OF ROBERT SOUTHEY, Poet Laureate (born 1774).

CHARLES ALGERNON SWINBURNE born.

Wordsworth meets Tennyson.

Wordsworth writes eulogistically of Tennyson to Professor Reed.

1844. Death of John Sterling.

1845. Tennyson receives a pension of £200 from Sir Robert Peel, prime minister.

January 31. Tennyson dines at the poet Rogers'.

DEATH OF THOMAS HOOD (born 1798).

1847. "THE PRINCESS, A MEDLEY," published.

Sir John Franklin lost in the Arctic (born 1786).

1849. Death of Lady Blessington (born 1789).

1850. June 13. Tennyson married to Emily, daughter of Henry Sellwood, Esq., of Horncastle (a niece of Sir John Franklin).

April 23. DEATH OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, Poet Laureate (born 1770).

"IN MEMORIAM" published. Three editions appeared the same year.

Death of Sir Robert Peel (born 1788).

Death of Henry Fitzmaurice Hallam.

Nov. 21. TENNYSON GAZETTED POET LAUREATE.

1851. March 6. Tennyson attends the Queen's Levee.

The seventh edition of Tennyson's poems appears.

September. Tennyson in France.

1852. Sept. 14. DEATH OF THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON (born 1769).

Death of Thomas Moore (born 1779).

In the course of this year several anti-Gallic or anti-Napoleonic songs appeared, supposed to be by the Laureate. (Two verses addressed to America omitted in the later edition of "Hands all round.")

Hallam Tennyson born at Twickenham, where the poet then resided.

1854. Death of Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd (born 1795).

John Wilson (Kit North) dies (born 1785).

Frederick Tennyson publishes a volume of poems.

Dec. 9. "The Charge of the Light Brigade" appears in "The London Examiner."

1855. The Poet Laureate is admitted to the honorary degree of D. C. L. Oxon.

"MAUD, AND OTHER POEMS," published.

Death of Mary Russell Mitford (born 1786).

Death of Samuel Rogers (born 1763).

1856. Death of Hugh Miller.

1857. Enid and Nemue privately printed.

Death of Alfred de Musset.

Hawthorne sees Tennyson at Manchester.

Bayard Taylor visits Tennyson at the Isle of Wight.

1859. Death of Leigh Hunt (born 1784).

DEATH OF THOMAS BABINGTON LORD MACAULAY.

DEATH OF HENRY HALLAM (born 1777).
Death of Thomas De Quincey (born 1785).
DEATH OF WASHINGTON IRVING (born 1783).
July. "IDYLLS OF THE KING" published.

1861. DEATH OF THE PRINCE CONSORT.
DEATH OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

1863. March 18. "Welcome to Alexandra" published.
DEATH OF THACKERAY.
Death of Richard Whately (born 1787).

1864. Mrs. Alfred Tennyson writes a song, "Alma River."
"ENOCH ARDEN" published.
Death of Walter Savage Landor (born 1775).
DEATH OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

1865. Death of Edward Everett (born 1794).
DEATH OF LORD PALMERSTON (born 1784).
Alfred Tennyson offered a baronetcy and declines it; admitted to the Royal Society.

1866. Septimus Tennyson, a brother of the poet, dies at Cheltenham.
DEATH OF WILLIAM WHEWELL (born 1795).

1867. Professor Selwyn publishes a Latin Version of "Enoch Arden."
"The Window; or, The Loves of the Wrens," privately printed by Sir Ivor Guest.

1868. Alexander Strahan becomes the poet's publisher.
Death of Henry Hart Milman (born 1791).
Death of Sir David Brewster (born 1781).
"LUCRETIUS" published in Macmillan's.

1869. The poet elected an honorary fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, removes to Surrey.
Death of the Earl of Derby (born 1799).

1870. Death of Charles Dickens.
"THE HOLY GRAIL, AND OTHER POEMS," published (4 new idylls).

1871. Death of Henry Alford.
Death of George Grote (born 1794).

"THE LAST TOURNAMENT" published in "The Contemporary Review" for December.

1872. "GARETH AND LYNETTE" published.
DEATH OF FREDERICK MAURICE.
Library edition in six volumes of Tennyson's poems.

1873. DEATH OF LORD BULWER-LYTTON (born 1805).
Death of John Stuart Mill.

1874. H. S. King and Co. become the poet's publishers.

1875. "QUEEN MARY" published.

1877. "HAROLD" published.

1878. DEATH OF EARL RUSSELL (born 1792).
BIRTH OF ALFRED TENNYSON, the poet's grandson.

1879. DEATH OF CHARLES TENNYSON TURNER.
"THE LOVER'S TALE re-published.
"The Falcon" performed at the St. James.

1880. "BALLADS, AND OTHER POEMS," published, C. Kegan Paul and Co. become the poet's publishers.
Death of Frank Buckland (born 1826).
Death of Tom Taylor.
Death of George Eliot.
"The Cup" performed at "The Lyceum."

1881. Death of Thomas Carlyle (born 1795).
Death of Lord Beaconsfield.
Death of Mrs. S. C. Hall (born 1805).

1882. DEATH OF HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.
Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson (born 1803).
Death of Charles R. Darwin.
Death of Anthony Trollope.
Death of Dante G. Rossetti.
"The Promise of May" performed at "The Globe."

ALFRED TENNYSON,

POET LAUREATE.

HAS a Californian, as such, any literary right to discuss *belles-lettres* in print? And if yea, is a Californian magazine discreet in publishing such discussion? It has been a question with me, now that I have sifted my facts and collated reviews extending over a period of fifty years, whether there has not been too much written by those better advised touching the Poet Laureate to warrant any addition to the mass from this corner of the world. Common honesty demands, at all events, that one should disavow any pretence of originality, and say only that which may be flanked by citation and supported by decisions; and it is therefore with hesitancy that I approach the work, and with a doubt as to its adding to the vigor or impressiveness of our magazine.[1] One feels much as some literary Gascon in the days of the Pleiad might have felt in fumbling over questions of French language or rhythm secluded from Parisian sympathy by his provincial exile.

But a poet's reputation is, after all, a sort of meteor-

[1] Reprinted and revised from the "Overland Monthly" for January, 1883.

ological fact, which may be said to require reported observations from a large expanse of surface; and in many stations these become the duty of unpretentious subalterns; for the world of literature is no longer Paris or London, but the "Great Globe itself."

Tennyson enjoys at least a titular popularity in America. If that needed confirmation, the unremitting piracy of his works would furnish it. In one or more forms, they may be found in all polite households; charming ladies the world over will, if urged, gratify you by singing his lyrics; clever, penniless young bachelors everywhere will, when jilted, mouth stanzas of Locksley Hall; and chaps with ill-balanced hearts, who have become unhappily spooney about their friends' wives, will half imagine themselves Lancelots or Tristrams; while village Guineveres are as plentiful as village Cromwells, and not always as guiltless in their particular *pose*. Has not the poor, pale corpse of the Lily Maid been bandied about among us of the Pacific coast as recklessly as if it were a mummy in a museum, or a "stiff" on an express train? Who shall say that we do not know our poet intimately? And what is there that a prosy essayist out here can tell us in that behalf?

And yet, one feels that there is a certain sediment of *méfiance* pervading the half-cultured strata of the American reading public, which hinders the Englishman's verse from thorough assimilation with the popular American nature. It is almost as if a taste for

Tennyson were an exotic, requiring greenhouse fastidiousness to protect it from rude republican "northers."

This literary symptom (not, however, exactly confined to Tennyson) has been growing apparent in the last twenty years. Former generations not only courted British culture, but found it a necessity. To-day there is arising an actual aversion to British ideas —at least, in what may be called the superficial literary populace.

The fact is, Great Britain is becoming foreign to us. Like the Irish, our literary state is conspiring for Home Rule, and clamors for a parliament of its own. We dislike to be thought to speak the English rather than the American language. Even in our pronunciation and modulation, there is a sibboleth apparent; and we gird at the Britisher who has not our speech, however provincial it be, just as country louts are amused at a stranger's costume or special habits of body. Usages once common to both lands are fast wearing out with us; and a time would seem to be coming when English and American, once identical, will be to each other as Japanese unto Chinese.

An evidence of the divergence between the two countries is furnished by the fading popularity (regard being had to the increase of population and relative greater percentage of general readers) of English authors once as eagerly conned in America as in the land of their domicile. This partly arises from the confused ideas of superficially educated

Americans as to British customs, usages, and local terms—a defect which renders the reading of British writers a matter of painful thought, more or less clogged with ignorance and uncertainty as to the allusions. I do not think Scott as popular in America as formerly; Burns is actually archaic; and Hogg requires more than a glossary even to clever people who are ordinarily swift to catch the slang current in bar-rooms and mining camps, as crystallized in local or humorous journalism.

All this is a weakness to be deplored. If our literature had become so broad and deep by reason of its Longfellows, its Hawthornes, its Irvings, its Howellses, and its Holmeses, there might be ground for national pride in our literary progress; but the generation that knows not Joseph also forgets Joseph's brethren and sympathizers on this side the ocean; and is apt to be satisfied with thought, poetry, or humor born of no higher fancy than might be bred in the cabin of the Arkansas Traveller. The literature chosen to supplant Englisn models must be better, not worse, than what has been cast upon us by British descent.

Then, too, it happens that, while we are moving farther from British influence, we are drawing closer to lands which foster the alienation. Our young folks are running the risk of knowing more about Zola than about Thackeray; and our æsthetic ladies are more interested in Mademoiselle de Maupin than in the Vicar of Wakefield's Olivia. And yet they might draw a personal benefit from the good taste and ele-

gance of Goldy, which their quavering knowledge of a foreign tongue must ever be a barrier to their finding or appreciating in Gautier.

If, therefore, I sermonize a while about an author whom all ought to appreciate, gentle or simple, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, it is but to repeat an Old-World echo of instruction which distance and a murky literary atmosphere have almost weakened to unintelligibility. I would like to discuss Tennyson in the light in which cultivated people in his own country regard him and his works, as shown by commentators in magazines or published volumes.

The life of Alfred Tennyson has not been one of startling events. There are no prominent facts in his career hurtled about as literary gossip which would render his biography a dramatic poem. Save for the fact that he is a poet and poet laureate, his existence has been passed in the elegant obscurity affected by cultured Englishmen who keep out of politics.

His poetry, in one sense, is not egoistic; and he has shrunk from breaking up the privacy of his life to build the materials into the structure of his poetic reputation.

But nevertheless, everything that we need to know or perhaps ought to wish to know of Tennyson is in his writings, if we will but "read between the lines." For that matter, I would challenge any man with the slightest claim to frankness to write anything at all

without confessing some portion of his nature. I remember how a gentleman of old California days came to his death by shipwreck. His general reputation had been of decidedly misanthropic acerbity. None gave him credit for especial warmth of feeling. Yet with death not a quarter of an hour away, he attempted an autographic will of half a dozen lines, which, by its kindness of tone towards children, strangers to his blood, and towards collaterals, by the preciseness of his chirography and punctuation, by the aptness of terms, and the fact that one of them was Scotch, gave indirectly the materials for a biography of a frosty but kindly nature, bred in the Land o' Cakes, in a lawyer's office, thence transferred to journalist duties on a distant shore, of as heroic a soul as one would expect to dwell in the breast of even the *vieux militaire* who sank with him. In like manner, one might compose a charming history of Tennyson by stringing together verses from his poems; and one might also branch out and show not only what has been, but what might have been—a feature wanting in most biographies. One might mistake a detail here and there, it is true; but the general truth would be told.

Alfred Tennyson was born August 5th, 1809, at Somersby, a village in Mid-Lincolnshire. Even Americans have heard of the Lincolnshire Fens; and every poem of Tennyson's youth tells of some feature of the scenery of the land, the verdure and foliage of

meadow, marsh, and wood, the brook that flows by Somersby, the mill upon it,

"The sandy tracts,
And the hollow ocean ridges roaring into cataracts."

For here the German Ocean has full sweep, and seems to enjoy its gambols. It is in Lincolnshire that the poet has laid the scene of his latest drama, "The Promise of May."

Tennyson's father, Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was rector of the parish of Somersby. The poet's mother was the daughter of the Rev. Stephen Fytche.

Tennyson comes of gentle stock. Indeed, some of the collateral branches must have been quite tenacious and precise in the matter of their claims in that regard. There are, I believe, extinct baronies lying around, here and there, in the family history. Those Englishmen are proud of nothing so much as springing from an old county family; and I have no doubt but that Tennyson has a proper weakness that way, befitting a man who need not be his own grandfather, and who is grandfather to others. Of course, he has his quiet thrusts at pride of birth; but behind them remains, evidently, the feeling which, while covered by indifference to the pomps of heraldry, borders on satisfaction that he, also, might, had he willed it so.

"Somewhere beneath his own low range of roofs
Have also set his many-shielded tree." [1]

[1] Aylmer's Field.

The entire Tennysonian household were poets—"a nest of nightingales," as one of their friends calls them.[1] There was Charles, who afterward took the surname of Turner, Frederick, Septimus, Edward, Horatio, and Arthur; and there were two sisters who likewise made girlish attempts at verse.

One can readily picture the youth of the poet spent in an English rectory, swarming with sisterly and cousinly maidens; such, doubtless, as Trollope and the artists who have illustrated Trollope have depicted for us. No ordinary nature could pass through that sort of training without a certain wincing softness that would give tone to his whole after-existence. It may, therefore, be noted that all of Tennyson's heroines, of whatever race, time, or clime, are, morally, just such people as one would likely meet in an English country house on long, summer days, book in hand, or in a parish church at Christmas-tide, helping the curate with the evergreens, or flirting in demure style with the lads home from college or London.

Tennyson's father was a man of accomplishments —more, perhaps, than of scholarship or of theological propensities. He was an athlete, a musician, a linguist.[2] It would seem that the poet learned Italian to some extent—possibly induced by his father. In those days, there was a breeze of revival of interest in Italian letters, owing to the fact that England had become a refuge for a number of lettered revolutionists, such as Foscolo, Panizzi. and Rossetti; and

[1] S. C. Hall's Book of Gems. [2] Howitt, 1847.

Tennyson's short-lived friend Hallam was gliding into the Tuscan groove of culture, with no mean promise of future effectiveness and honor in that direction.[1]

Tennyson's status in life pointed vaguely to the Anglican church as his possible vocation; but it was fortunate that he escaped being a parson. I fancy that his brother Charles would have lived a more rounded and complete life had he never taken orders. Besides, one never sees Reverend before an author's name without expecting something goody-goody and narrow. Alfred might have been driven into the inns of court; but one shudders at the thought that the brow now decked with laurel should have run the risk of perspiring in a horse-hair wig, although poets and true ones *have* sat on the bench and been its ornaments. *Testibus*, Sir William Jones, Talfourd, and for that matter, many a Scotch laird. And is there not Browning, who by rights ought to have been a Q. C., chopping up, say, the law of remainders in a court of equity, instead of knitting his brows and frowning in a lord-chancellor way on high Parnassus?

The only other employment in which Tennyson, according to our present lights, would not have cut a moderate figure would have been the army. What a jovial mess member he would have been! How he would have shirked drill and pipe-clay! What rollicking camp songs he would have composed and sung! What a popular colonel he would have grown to be! And how religiously and simultaneously he would have

[1] Hallam's Remains.

hated and abused the French, and have seen that the mess port was of the right body and flavor! He would have been just in time to go out to the Crimea, and to take part with his Six Hundred there, instead of singing their exploits in slippered feet at home, where his big bass voice, fit to call a squadron to advance, was utterly thrown away on boots and the butler. (There was, by the way, another Englishman who would have graced any branch of the service, but whose life was wasted on art—poor George Cruikshank.)

It might here be noted that when certain Crimean heroes came home, and were called to receive their academic brevets from Oxford, 1855, in the shape of doctorates in jurisprudence, Tennyson was joined with them in the honors for his poetic gallantry.

No, I don't think that Major-General Sir Alfred Tennyson, K. C. B., etc., etc., would sound badly. But if it were the present fact, what a loss to us on this side of the Atlantic, who have, lo, these many years, enjoyed and stolen his work so remorselessly!

Tennyson's physical, mental, and moral nature and needs are those of a man enjoying active, every-day life, with a right to take long furloughs from it, and retreat into his library as occasion demands; apt to linger in cozy discussion "across the walnuts and the wine," when the ladies had cleared out; to sit on a stile and remark a colt's points; to take a languid interest in turnips and crop rotation; and to have interchange of

proper courtesies with suspected poachers on the subject of wood-craft, or with the pretty farmers' daughters touching their swains. In America, there is somehow a lack among literary men of that sort of catholicity of intercourse; and my idea of the blessed Longfellow has always been of one who had the New England college tutor thoroughly injected into his marrow at an early age, and who would have been fearful of saying or doing anything hostile to varnished boots or academic discipline.

The two brothers, Charles and Alfred, were early sent to the Louth grammar school. It was here that, in March, 1827, they jointly published a small volume of verse, entitled "Poems by Two Brothers."[1] It was stated in the preface that the pieces contained in the volume had been written by them between their fifteenth and eighteenth years.

This little collection has become a great bibliomaniac rarity. The late Rev. Dr. Chapin of New York was said to possess the only copy ever brought to America.[2]

Criticism of verse attempts by young school-boys would of course be idle; but the fact of the publication may simply be marked, as showing at how early an age and with what apparent success the poet had put in practice his studies of the laws of English rhythm.

[1] Poems by Two Brothers. Printed by J. & J. Jackson, Market Place, Louth, Lincolnshire.

[2] Bayard Taylor's Essay on Tennyson.

In 1829 the two poetic lads went to reside at Cambridge, whither young Hallam had preceded them some months, with whom Alfred contracted the warmest of friendships, strengthened, as it was to be, by an engagement between one of the poet's sisters and Hallam.

Within half a year from his entry at Trinity College, Alfred was declared the successful competitor for the Chancellor's Gold Medal for English verse—the subject imposed being Timbuctoo.[1]

The name recalls the famous witty and successful attempt of Sydney Smith to find a rhyme for it, and invokes something of the grotesque in our feelings; but if we consider what gorgeous speculations were then rife as to the resources and condition of Central Africa, and the fabulous tales in vogue about its cities and their treasures, it would seem natural enough that a question of such great geographical interest should have been suggested as the subject for verse.

A couple of years before, an adventurous British officer had lost his life in attempting to gain personal knowledge of Timbuctoo.[2]

Prize poems have, I think, been rather unjustly abused. But if they have no other *raison d'être*, one might now be found in the fact that Tennyson had buckled down to the task of competing for a prize, and had succeeded so well that the effort became the hinge of his poetic reputation. And it would appear,

[1] Printed at Cambridge, 1829. See also, Cambridge Prize Poems.
[2] Major Laing.

too, that there was a brilliant set of students at Cambridge in those days, when Tennyson bore the banner of success, and young Hallam and Thackeray were among the defeated candidates. In looking over the names of eminent Englishmen who at that time resided at Cambridge, as undergraduates or otherwise, one cannot help thinking that there was there transpiring what we Westerners would call an "intellectual boom." It is not necessary here to discuss the merits of Timbuctoo; but it is not out of place to call the attention of San Franciscans to the way in which the young Cantab, who had never felt the shudder of an earthquake, hits off the salient suggestions elicited by the experience:

> "As when in some great city when the walls
> Shake, and the streets with ghastly faces thronged
> Do utter forth a subterranean sound."

There are but three lines; but the phenomenon is fully described.

The "Athenæum" declared that the poem "indicated first-rate poetical genius, and would have done credit to any man that ever wrote."[1]

In 1830 Tennyson published a volume,[2] entitled "Poems Chiefly Lyrical." Of this collection there appeared in the "Westminster" for January, 1831, a review written, it is said, by John Stuart Mill, wherein, after defining the duty, influence, and power of a true poet, the following prophetic passage occurs:

[1] Written either by John Sterling or Frederick Maurice.
[2] London, Effingham Wilson.

"If our estimate of Mr. Tennyson is correct, he, too, is a poet; and many years hence may he read his juvenile description of that character, with the proud consciousness that it has become the description and history of his own work."[1]

Leigh Hunt also, in the "Tatler,"[2] gave a favorable review of the volume in conjunction with one published simultaneously by Charles Tennyson; and Arthur Hallam wrote a notice of his friend's venture, which appeared in "The Englishman's Magazine."

Kit North, in his breezy way, clinched the strain of eulogy in "Blackwood's" (May, 1832),[3] mixing kind encouragement with a certain amount of critical banter. In acknowledgment of this latter notice, Tennyson wrote the lines "Musty, Fusty Christopher," which appeared in a second volume published in the winter of 1832–33, by the poet-publisher, Moxon.

This second volume was discussed by Coleridge in "Table-Talk";[4] and the veteran brings the singular charge against the young poet of a mismanagement of his metres, recommending him to stick to two or three common ones. Now Coleridge knew all about rhythm, and meant to be a fair critic; but in the light of Tennyson's rhythmical history, we cannot fail to suspect the justice of all poetical criticism.

As adverse utterances, that of the "Quarterly" (July,

[1] Westminster, January, 1831.
[2] Tatler, numbers from February 24th, 1831, to March 3rd, 1831.
[3] Blackwood, Vol. XXXI.
[4] Table-Talk, Vol. II.

1833),[1] is the most noticeable. It found all the weak chords in Mr. Tennyson's lyre; and spoke distrustfully and scornfully of many others, since acknowledged to be strong. The "Quarterly" in after years manfully retracted its hasty opinion.

But out of the collections thus far published by the young man, enough pieces stood their ground to entitle the author to take decided rank as a poet.

The year 1833[2] was the year of young Hallam's death—that Hallam who had been more than a brother to a poet who knew the worth of sympathetic fraternity; and to Hallam's memory, seventeen years later, Tennyson unveiled the most graceful literary monument that could be raised to the memory of a friendship cut short by death.

The time had now come when the poet could not be allowed to rest confidingly upon ancient models or to find a large enough world in the limits of a college quadrangle. He had become a man; and whatever life men of his day led, would be, if not his own, at least a strong agency in marking out his pathway for him. The most "offish" of us are affected to some extent by those about us; and we cannot wholly avoid the vices of our day and generation, even if we would.

If any one would like to frame an idea of *quasi* fine literary society in England between 1830 and 1840, he has only to study the ways and doings of coteries

[1] Vol. XLIX.; see Vol. LXX.

[2] Died September 15, 1833, at Vienna.

such as Lady Blessington's, and simultaneously to read Disraeli's novels. From our standpoint, it was a very good sort of life to keep out of; and Tennyson, in spite of some quavering motions, must have remained on the utter rim. It was a time when men had pallid brows and long hair and brocade dressing-gowns, and were suspected of corsets, and had a glory of soft white hands, innocent of blisters and gauded with rings—a reign of Pelhams and Count d'Orsays in drawing-rooms —a time of Annuals and Books of Gems and Keepsakes and Friendship's Offerings—all illustrated with plates and engraved titles, and to which contributed languorous gentlemen, whose fathers had sparred with Jackson and fought with bargemen, and whose sons, in their subsequent day, took to club-swinging and foot-racing; dainty volumes patronized by impossible copper-plate beauties, who wrote watery verse and flirted with the Melbournes and the Endymions of the hour.

I have said that Tennyson somehow escaped all that —the glamour whereof led captive the soul of the future tory leader, and made him, as a reward for his appreciative worship, like Joseph in Egypt, a ruler among strangers to his blood. But Tennyson did contribute to the annuals; and one of the most exquisite bits of his verse, afterwards embodied in Maud, first saw light in one of those fashionable collections.[1]

But Tennyson must have studied in one direction—

[1] The Tribute, edited by Lord Northampton, 1837.

"O, that 'twere possible,
After long grief and pain.'

that of nature—with no careless attention. No poet can effectively pursue his calling if deprived of the essentials of out-door life and pure air. He needs the odors and harmonies of the country to guide him in tuning his harp. He cannot shut himself up in a city without more or less vulgarizing his muse, and rendering his imagery paltry. He cannot bar out the world of sensuous force by closing his library door, without growing fastidious and finical. What would Scott have been but for his stumbling strolls through the heaths, with Maida at his heels? What sort of verse would Byron have written, had he not found the sea a place to revel in? I think the real obstacle which shunted Lamb off the poetic highway was his intense cockneyism. He had it in him to be a poet, and would have been one, had he been compelled to rest his eyes upon beds of wild flowers instead of shop windows and book-stalls.

Tennyson all his life has continued the habit which he had commenced in his Lincolnshire boyhood, of illustrating his verse with suggestions from nature. He is so fond of the trick, and is so full of surprises of that kind, that his critics have taken to carping at the accuracy of his facts. Bayard Taylor speaks of some of his similes as inapt, and instances where he compares the rippling, broken gurgles of a girl's laughter to a woodpecker's tapping. I fancy it is a question, not of the tapper, but of the sounding-board. Some kinds of woods when struck give an

almost liquid response. Another critic objects to the poet's making a dog leap from the water to the land, and shake his ears as he recovers his balance. This critic says a dog does not leap but climbs ashore, and waggles his entire body before attending to his dripping ears. Now, it is true that if the dog were in the act of swimming, he would not leap; but if it were a shallow brook, he would make a quick jump from the one element to the other; and if he had pendant ears they would likely be wet when his back would be dry. Indeed, the jump itself would shake his ears. I would hardly be willing to admit that Tennyson was an inaccurate or near-sighted observer in matters of natural phenomena; and he is certainly possessed of an immense fund of forest-and-field wisdom.

Tennyson did not issue any new volumes after Hallam's death, until 1842, although, as before mentioned, verses by him appeared in the annuals.

Those who have read the lately published volume of letters to and by Miss Mitford will remember the energetic scorn which she evinces for those who write but do not read. Tennyson had no such conceit of self-evolution. He has written sparingly and read diligently.

The nine years of comparative silence were undoubtedly with him a period of study. His mental structure was being "fed with lime," drawn from the nourishment furnished by masters in poetry; and he

had completely acquired his virile strength by cautious exercise of his powers, when, in 1842, he published a new edition of his poems in two volumes (republished the same year by Ticknor, Boston), from which it may be shown that by that time he had adopted the essential features of his mature style, whereon the success of his literary career has been based.

The epic idyll is there represented by the "Morte d'Arthur"; "Dora" stands as a model of his other idyllic efforts; "Locksley Hall," "Ulysses," "The Day-Dream," "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere," "Break, Break, Break," and "Come not when I am dead," are all typical in their several manners of Tennyson.

Tennyson was recognized thenceforth as a poet. It must not, however, be lost sight of that, literary-wise, his lines had fallen in pleasant places. His antecedents were all of cultured dignity. He had been the honored nursling of a venerable academy of learning. His friends were brilliant in their ways of thought, and stood manfully by him. The reviews had been kind to him in the main, and the portals of the temple of fame, if not staring open, were at least ajar for his coming.

In 1845, Wordsworth, too great-minded to be afraid of his newly created peer, pronounced Tennyson to be "decidedly the first of our living poets."[1]

Had Tennyson followed in the wake of Keats, with whom at an early period he was frequently compared,

[1] Letter to Professor Reed.

he would only have intensified his model until his exaggerations became defects. Keats might have been, perhaps, a good companion, but not a master. The secret to rival Keats in his special class of merits would best be solved by poring over the writers of the days of Queen Bess. These, the Laureate seems in his youth to have studied and understood. Here I would note the precocity of the poet. With most of us, the thoughts of great authors need to be subjected to successive winnowings through our minds at intervals of years. We do not obtain all that is precious at one reading or at one period in our lives. But Tennyson would seem to have extracted every beauty of style at one sifting, and to have deftly worked every grain of knowledge so acquired into his own mass.

Gladstone regards Tennyson's Homeric and Dantesque studies as at one time scanty; but Gladstone has been cultivating the Homeric field for more than fifty years, with a fine-toothed rake; and any ordinary knowledge on the subject would to him probably appear defective. I am afraid, too, that, however strong may be the Premier's friendship for the Laureate, the former does not quite follow the latter throughout his entire poetic labyrinth. There is, however, one piece of evidence in favor of Gladstone's slur upon Tennyson's Homeric shortcomings: when the poet makes Ulysses address his old companions with a request to sail with him again out into the west, had he had Homer in his mind, he would have been aware that all those brave souls—Greenwich Pensioners, so to speak—had gone

to Hades; and that it would be necessary to ship a fresh crew of merely ordinary seamen. Probably he preferred to err with Dante, who knew not the Odyssey, relying for the success of his paraphrase of the Italian upon its being marvellously true to Homeric spirit, if faulty in incident.

Mr. Stedman, in his elaborate chapters upon Tennyson, seeks to draw a general parallel between the Victorian age, of which Tennyson stands forth as the poet, and the Ptolemaic or Alexandrian period of Greek literature. It does seem to me strange that, in this age of critical literary research and revamping of old material, more has not been done to bring into direct popularity the authors of that cultivated era. Fox, I think, is said to have preferred the "Argonautica" of Apollonius to Homer himself. Macaulay admired the poem; and it would be no ungraceful task for some ambitious young scholar of to-day to attempt a metrical translation of the work.

Tennyson, in dawdling about old country houses and their libraries, seems to have fallen upon many an old volume of the classics not usual in university examinations. Mr. Stedman thinks that, because there was a new edition of Bion and Moschus in print during Tennyson's Cambridge years, his attention must have been thereby attracted to those authors. It may be so; but one would prefer to believe that he rummaged the authors out of some old collection in cracked covers, worm-eaten and mouldy, led thereto by some apt quotation which lingered in his mind as a sample

of what a search would bring forth; and that, having hunted down his author, he devoured him, more with literary hunger than academic or scholarly ambition. There are in Tennyson refined echoes of Quintus Calaber, Tryphiodorus, and other dust-covered old worthies, editions of whose works were published in days when men had more time, and did more than merely pretend to read.

There is one elegance which Tennyson seems to have caught early from Virgil. Sainte-Beuve joins with Fox in admiring Virgil for his power to infuse his own originality into his most exact imitations of his Greek predecessors. From Virgil, Tennyson's mode of paraphrase comes, employed almost always by him in a most felicitous way.

He has an art, too, of adopting the epithets already applied to objects by older writers—the giving to things, as it were, their christened names. And it has a very happy effect upon the mind of the reader. For, if he be familiar with the godfather, a double set of imagery is thrown upon his mental retina—or rather, like a dissolving view, the old idea recalled momentarily by the epithet fades softly into the glory of the new thought brought in by the later poet.

It would be curious to gather together a vocabulary of all the classical phrases for which Tennyson has furnished pat English equivalents.

Although transferring to English, passages from Latin, Greek, and Italian poets seems to have been a recreation for which Tennyson has a particu-

lar affection, it is not, however, original with him. From Chaucer down, it has been common with English poets—learned by them from Italian writers, perhaps, and originated with the Latins. The famous lines of Catullus, in his epithalamium upon Manlius and Julia—"*Ut flos in septis*"—probably taken originally from Sappho, have been appropriated or imitated by Tasso, Ariosto, Jacques Gohorry, Spenser, and Jonson, to say nothing of out-and-out translations by others. Byron has the same taste.

Tennyson has used more than once a passage from Homer—

> "Where falls not hail or rain or any snow
> Nor ever wind blows loudly"—[1]

which he found that Lucretius had used before him; and which Dante has also worn as a gem—"a jewel five words long."[2]

Americans of casual Latinity cannot quite appreciate how vividly the verse of Virgil lingers in the minds of English lads, be they ever so indolent at study.

With the English gentleman, Virgil is a sacred book—verbally inspired. There is nothing in America similar to the reverence hitherto paid it by the Briton of culture, unless, perhaps, the devotion of the old-fashioned, square-shouldered American, in the good days gone by, to the English Bible. (I fancy that it is to

[1] Morte d'Arthur; see also Lucretius.

[2] "Perche non pioggia, non grando, non neve
Non rugiada, non brina piu su cade—"
Purg. XXI.

the familiarity thereby obtained with the genuine English tongue that we are indebted for any purity of speech left. As for Webster's Spelling-book, we may thank it for the metallic phonograph sounds which bewray us all over the world. Why could it not have been fated that some Scotchman or Irishman should have struck the tuning-fork of our American orthoepy?)

I doubt if Virgil would not be the first thought, on the subject of poetry, of every Englishman who went to school fifty years ago. He was almost confessedly Tennyson's, as shown by his summarized judgment of the poet in his Mantuan ode, published the other day. Virgil is the patron saint of our five hundred years of Renaissance, and Tennyson closes the dynasty of its high priests.

From Virgil to Theocritus, so far as idyllic poetry is concerned, is but a step. Virgil's shield is the same as that of Theocritus, only with the difference of a Latin field instead of a Greek one; and what Tennyson failed to find in Virgil, he sought in the "Sicilian Shepherd."

But it would be useless to set forth all the paths of labor which the poet has travelled in his reading to glean material wherewith to enrich his muse. Even in his most fervid and off-hand efforts, he has apparently first racked his memory for a model or a suggestion. The "Charge of the Light Brigade"[1] recalls, by a line or two (suppressed, I believe), the ancient Greek revo-

[1] London Examiner, December 9th, 1854. Maud, and Other Poems, 1855.

lutionary song of Harmodios and Aristogeiton, showing how Tennyson had cast about him for a precedent in the past. Tennyson's sources of literary culture may principally be found in Greek, Latin, Italian, and English literature. He hardly seems to be attracted to French; and if he does use that tongue, it is probably the form known as Duke-of-Wellington French—a speech which came to be popular after Waterloo.

The Laureate, whatever liberality there may be in his character, is an Englishman. He does not belong to that class of elastic cosmopolites, who, in whatever land they may be, give the impression that they were born elsewhere. He believes thoroughly in British insulation; and in company the other day with a numerous assembly of the nobility and gentry, signed the Channel protest, wishing it to be of record that he for one believed in maintaining those bulwarks of British glory —the Channel fleet and sea-sickness.

> "God bless the narrow seas!
> I wish they were a whole Atlantic broad."

Tennyson does not show any faith in the modern hexameter; and he has a sneer for the German article —probably as found in Voss. He may not be partial to German literature: save in "Maud" (and possibly not there), he scarcely indicates any German reading. When he was young, German scholarship in England was meagre. It was only when Carlyle, by force and arms, compelled attention to it, that a knowledge in that

direction became common. De Quincey, for philosophical uses, studied the tongue; Coleridge and Shelley took hold of it for poetry's sake; Walter Scott translated Goetz von Berlichingen. But in the early part of the century, besides his unsavory Monk, a knowledge of German was the only recommendation to literary notice that Matthew Lewis could assert. Nowadays, almost any clever English girl (leaving out her brother, Macaulay's school-boy) is supposed to be able to read Schiller.

It would not be wise to contradict an opinion on the subject of verse melody originating with the poet. His ear has been too long in the training of harmonious sounds to be distrusted; but though there is a deal of sibilation in Voss's hexameters, it gives, after all, a seething, swishing spatter to the verse that sounds of the Baltic waves, and remotely, of Homer and the Ægæan.

One test of excellence, if it be a test, has been tried again and again upon Tennyson. It is the transferring of his poems by scholars into Latin verse. At this amusement, some of the noted Latinists in England have tried their hands. I noticed, some months since, a translation into Greek of the pretty song in "The Cup."[1] Such *jeux d'esprit* show how affectionately he is regarded by the scholarly portion of the rising generation in England. Tennyson is the only English author besides Shakspere and Milton who has

[1] The Theatre, June, 1881.
"Moon on the field and foam."

been found worthy of a concordance. Samuel Rogers, with all his wealth to gild his claims as poet, could never have invaded the hearts of artists of brush and pencil as Tennyson has done, nor could he have ever furnished such inspiration for their work.

Tennyson's attitude towards his critics and the public has ever been one of patient humility. It is rare that he shows any restive anger. One or two poems have an indignant sound; and on one occasion—namely, towards Bulwer—he did exhibit temper, which, notwithstanding the provocation, he has since no doubt regretted.

I am nowise sure, however, that Bulwer's "Miss Alfred"[1] was not a beneficial sneer, after all. There *was* a general tone and perfume of *boudoir* elegance pervading his then published poems, which, agreeable under certain conditions, might have become too much of a good thing. And, besides, some of his early poems—for example, "O Darling Room"—are quite too awfully nice to escape brutal critics. The fact is, that a minstrel's listeners must be mailed knights as well as gentle ladies; and he must sing accordingly, if he would not be relegated to the companionship of the idolized pianist and limp curate—objects of mysterious interest to the feminine heart, but unloved by coarser males.

In response to Bulwer's rasping mention of him,

[1] The New Timon, Punch, February 7th, 1846 (Vol. X.). See Dedication of Harold.

Tennyson gave one deep-chested howl of ire [1] (just to show his critic that he had been nudging an *Ursus horridus* instead of a sentimental girl), and then trimmed his style to avoid a similar reproach in the future. He has, in fact, used criticism very much as painters use a mirror, to verify or discover errors in drawing or color.

In the earlier volumes, Tennyson appended exegetical notes, here and there, to bring the reader into better intelligence with the verse. There was too much of it in some instances, and he ultimately veered to the other extreme, and dropped notes of any kind. We all have laughed heartily at Thackeray's burlesque upon Timbuctoo, which was printed in "The Snob" of university days; and one of the most amusing features of the squib is the wealth of exegesis appended. To avoid the error there satirized, Tennyson stripped his poems of all prose explanation. I do not know that such a course is always commendable. For my own part, I find it very comfortable to be bolstered up by marginal commentary. There is more wit, philosophy, and information in Byron's autograph elucidation of his own works than in many authors' texts.

And in this connection, would it not be a good idea if some clever American editor, who would not mind being a thief, should publish an edition of Tennyson with a running commentary made up with

[1] Punch, February 28th, 1846 (Vol. X.).

excerpts, more or less apposite or true, from the criticisms which have appeared of our poet, from "Musty, Fusty Christopher" down to the latest date, together with all the parallel passages marked by admirers or foes? It would do Tennyson no harm, and might stir up a closer spirit of examination, and consequent better appreciation of his merit and power. Something in the nature of an annotated edition was at one time contemplated in England.

The author of "A New Study of Tennyson," in Cornhill,[1] wonders why the poet does not give Miss Mitford credit for "Dora," so far as plot is considered. In the 1842 edition there is a note to that effect, also crediting Miss Ferrier (Walter Scott's pet young authoress)[2] with the idea of "Lady Clare"; but the rigid suppression of notes carried that one with the rest.

Tennyson has, throughout his career of literary labor, not merely inverted his stilus to rub out a word here and there; but whenever he fancied a verse or a whole poem to be overripe or rotten, he has not hesitated to tear out page after page, and fling whole editions into the fire. But the permanency of print to him is a curse. His older versions have acquired a charm for ghoulish bibliomaniacs; and notwithstanding his suppressive policy, he is impotent in his endeavors, and must sit and suffer pangs while surreptitious and piratic editions of his early poems are being passed about under his very nose.

[1] Cornhill, 1880. [2] Marriage and Inheritance.

"The Lover's Tale" (what motive could have induced him to withdraw it from publication?), written when the poet was nineteen, is a specimen of his fastidious anxiety; some freebooting publisher of late years issued it illicitly, and the Laureate "had him up" for the offence, but was finally obliged to yield to his fate, and issue it himself. The London "Times" intimated that theft of that sort would become popular, if publication of a sought-for poem were thereby enforced.

What an unpretentious, winning poem is "The Princess"! Who is there among articulately speaking men that has not been charmed by it? (By articulately speaking men, I mean, of course, English-speaking men.) It is so simple, so easy to understand (one wise critic, however, claims Tennyson's intelligibility to be a defect);[1] and yet it has political, moral, and social philosophy enough in it to furnish up a university or social congress. It appeared in 1847,[2] and showed that Wordsworth had not mistaken the merit of his successor to the laurel crown.

Several models may have been used to obtain the form of "In Memoriam." The one nearest in mechanical construction is the latter part of Petrarch's "Rime" (After Laura's Death). Adonais had been adopted by Shelley as his model for the poem on the death of Keats; and Tennyson had the Greek lament in his mind, as also Milton's Lycidas. Ben Jonson and Lord

[1] British Quarterly Review, 1880. [2] Moxon, 1847.

Herbert of Cherbury perhaps furnished the particular versification used.

But if we compare Tennyson's work with the Italian or English poems suggested, we find it infinitely superior both in matter and manner. There is always a hint of mawkishness, when a lover whines bemoaningly over a mistress, whether alive or dead; but a boy's friendship for his fellow is pure and reverential; and in the grandeur of the thoughts strung together, the man of the nineteenth century has by far the advantage in breadth and dignity over him of the fourteenth.

Lycidas, after all, has something of the air of a college exercise gotten up "to improve the occasion" of young King's death; and Shelley was thinking entirely too much of his Greek model to be completely natural in his verse or grief.

"In Memoriam" is neither more nor less than a careful treasure-house, wherein are stored the best and most affectionate of a man's thoughts for delivery on the joyous day when a far-travelled friend returns to his home.

In 1850,[1] Wordsworth died, and Tennyson was appointed to the laureateship[2] by Lord John Russell;

[1] April 23rd.

[2] Gazetted, November 21st, 1850, Poet Laureate in ordinary to Her Majesty. The same Annual Register which furnishes the record of the appointment also contains that of the death of Henry Fitzmauriee Hallam, the only son left of the historian. In the Poetry Department appear Wordsworth's "Prelude" and extracts from "In Memoriam."

Palmerston, as great an admirer of Virgil as Mæcenas himself, being of the cabinet.

The "Ode on the Death of Wellington"[1] was the first really important official duty undertaken by Tennyson—if a Laureate can be said to have duties. No appointed task is easy for a poet; and a poem for an occasion is likely to be weak and worthless. Duty gets but mediocre service out of its slaves. Yet if ever there was a man who could come to the task of poetic eulogy of the dead soldier, it was Tennyson. Wellington was nothing if not English—a character in which he claimed the poet's fullest reverence, who could sympathize fully with the Waterloo victor's intense Anglicanism, distrust of Napoleonic ideas, and faith in England's pluck and glory. All of the Laureate's metrical skill was accordingly invoked; and he even went back to the court of the Romano-Byzantine emperors for a poetic title grand enough and glorious enough to inscribe upon the sarcophagus of the Great Duke.

What a puzzle was "Maud"[2] to the critics for some time after its publication! How its rambling incoherency was discussed! The Laureate was actually compelled to insert, at places in the subsequent edition, additional verses to serve as bridges over the difficulties. And yet how simple it seems to-day! We have most of us grown up to it.

[1] Death September 14th, 1852. [2] 1855.

The poem is really an English version of the "Sorrows of Werther"—the facts being changed to correspond to English taste and prejudices. Indeed, some of the most exquisite passages might be versifications of the German prose, though it may be that Tennyson did not obtain his matter from that source. There is the same brooding introspection; the same impossible ambition to be something, one knows not what; the same sense of apprehension as to the passion of love. The English solution—"a hope for the world in the coming wars"—is better than the German crisis of snuffing out the candle of life altogether. There is the same disgust for the arrogance of wealth. I wonder how many of us thought of the "oiled and curled Assyrian bull" when the Stalwart leader translated the epithet, the other day, into the Stalwart dialect, and likened his faithful Achates unto "a prize ox, waiting for his blue ribbon."

I always regarded Thackeray's criticism of Tennyson's "Welcome to Alexandra" as one of the happiest expressions of literary judgment of record. Indeed, one always feels safe and satisfied when Thackeray ascends the bench. None but the novelist could have likened the Laureate to "a giant showing a beacon torch on a 'windy headland.' [Tennyson, I believe, then lived on the Isle of Wight.] His flaming torch is a pine-tree, to be sure, which nobody can wield but himself. He waves it; and four times in the midnight he shouts mightily, 'Alexandra!' and the pontic pine is whirled

into the ocean, and Enceladus goes home."[1] Think of the tall poet as Enceladus waving a flaming pine! Thackeray once said that Tennyson was the wisest man he knew.

The two men were at college together; but it is hardly likely that they were in the same set. The fact is, that Thackeray in those days must have been too wild for the rectory boy poet. We all enjoy the recital of the tricks and manners of the Steynes, the Cinqbars, the Ringwoods, and the Deuceaces; but, my dear young lady readers, it could hardly be that one should describe them so well without having frequented their society more than was good for a young gentleman with his fortune still to make. It is all right now; but what trouble the perverseness of attaining that sort of knowledge must have given, at the time, to those in family or collegiate authority!

I somehow fancy that we of this generation, who learned our letters before '50 (*Eheu fugaces!*), and were rather tender calves when the Rebellion broke out, who had to read the "Idylls of the King" by piecemeal, have been cheated out of the fullest appreciation of the work which would attend a perusal of the entire series as one logical unity. After "Morte d'Arthur," every one believed that Tennyson could write an English epic, if an English epic was to be written at all; and for all practical purposes the "Idylls" constitute an epic; and if the author did not

[1] On Alexandrines, Cornhill, April, 1862.

give them the name, it was probably out of respect for some arbitrary tradition, such as that which requires an epic to be limited in narrative, so far as the poet is concerned, to one year—in other words, to be the record of a single campaign.

It had been understood for years, before the Arthurian legends, constituting four of the "Idylls,"[1] were published, that the Laureate was at work upon a long poem; indeed, two of the "Idylls" had been privately printed, but were being held in suspense, and subject to emendation. For some time before the actual publication there was a buzz of literary expectancy, which pervaded the United States as well as England; and the eagerness to read the poems invaded classes ordinarily cold to the charms of verse. I can remember my own enthusiasm, in a western town, when the librarian handed me the only copy which had come, and which he had saved for me, and I shut myself up to enjoy the marvellous production before the bloom had vanished from the verse or the odor from the printer's ink.

Tennyson, as befitted an Englishman, took an English demi-god for his hero—that is, a hero conventionally agreed upon by myth dealers as English; for it is by no means certain that Arthur was not Breton rather than Briton in birth and domicile. People too who look into such matters closely seem to fancy that *Flos regum Arthurus* is a graft, imported from some Aryan nursery. The material forming

[1] Moxon, 1859.

the basis of the story was the Morte d'Arthur of Malory, helped out by other chroniclers—English, French, Welsh, and Irish—in prose and verse; for the story has oozed into the text of nearly all legends of the Romantic literature of Europe. The subject was said to be a favorite one with the late Prince Consort, whose taste shows itself in a quiet way in so many directions in English art and culture.

Among the sources other than Malory to which Tennyson betook himself for his frame-work of facts was the "The Mabinogion," or Boys' Own Book of Tales, as an English publisher might call it.

There was, half a century ago, down in the "black country" of Wales, a certain man of great financial genius, who "wrought till he crept from a gutted mine, master of half a servile shire," and of every other good thing which wealth can buy; and among these good things, of a noble and brilliant wife, one Lady Charlotte Lindsey. (All women named Lindsey or Lindsay are wonderfully clever; witness, Auld Robin Gray, etc.) This elegant dame took it into her head to publish an edition *de luxe* of the Mabinogion,[1] and to have it printed in Wales. Of course, it was the bibliographical wonder of the day. Scholars prized it, learned bishops spoke enthusiastically (and truthfully also) of its merits; while Tennyson, who seems to like

[1] The Mabinogion, from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest, and other ancient Welsh Manuscripts, with an English Translation and Notes. By Lady Charlotte Guest. London: Longman & Co., and W. Rees, Llandovery. 1840–48.

the Welsh, appropriated or conveyed from it into his collection of idylls the story of "Geraint ap Erbin," a tale that, whether in the original legend or in the poet's verse, more than rivals the Griseldis of Boccaccio for interest and simplicity of moral.

Tennyson is said to consider the idyll of "Guinevere" the culmination of the epic. I never felt very deeply the force of that idyll. It has somehow seemed to me that the real, painful crisis is when little Dagonet —the poor faithful clown, the affectionate human dog—looks up to his royal master and says, sobbing,

> "I am thy fool,
> And I shall never make thee smile again."

As to the Guinevere idyll, there would naturally be some sense of cheerfulness about the parties, like two divorced people taking lunch together after the judge has decreed separation *a vinculo.* Arthur's spirits are stirred by the battle in which he is about to engage—a dubious one, it is true; but Arthur is a Celt, and the outlook has its charms. On the other hand, Guinevere has been confessing the wrongs done by her; and next to wronging a friend or lover, what a woman most enjoys is telling him of it. In such a crisis, there is falsehood either to her lord or her lover, and falsehood is never lofty or touching. It is moral, however; but morality is neither epic nor tragic. If prim Madam Morality even escapes being laughable, she is lucky.

The business of appropriating other men's labors as

the foundation for one's own has been a matter of controversy in the forum of literary morality ever since the Æneid. Is it a merit or a vice to take up and improve another's thought? A certain class of critics would like to make it a crime; but, on the other hand, success seems to crown every author, whether epic poet or dramatist, who accomplishes such a robbery boldly and artistically. There is probably no great literary monument (not even excepting Homer's epics) that is not a plagiaristic conversion, for which not one but several generations and ages might be actionable together.

An instance of this successive appropriation is the story of "Federigo and the Falcon," claimed to be original with Boccaccio.[1] As a fact, it is an Arabic legend told of Hatem Tai, a sheik and poet of a period prior to Mohammed, whose metrical attacks upon avarice are still on the lips of his countrymen; the legend varying, however, in that it represents the sacrifice to hospitality as being a favorite horse which the Byzantine emperor, to make trial of Hatem's renowned generosity, had sent messengers to request as a gift, and which, on their arrival, and before Hatem had learned the object of their coming, he had (being straitened in his larder, and horseflesh being regarded as dainty food) killed and cooked for their entertainment. It was natural that the gallantry of western

[1] Landino, in his commentary upon Dante (Canto VIII., Inferno), declares that Boccaccio actually heard the story from Coppo, who knew the hero.

Europe should have substituted a lady-love for the emperor, and that the gentle sport of falconry should have suggested a pet hawk for the Arab's steed.

In style, Tennyson seems to harmonize, to a remarkable degree, with the languid tenderness of the Italian prosaist. Had Boccaccio been kept in Purgatory five hundred years for his sins of sense, and then as penance let loose in England to write what pleased him, he certainly would have chosen the Laureate's style.

Into what bright and glittering pieces Tennyson nas recoincd the old Italian bullion! And with what manly decency does he stand out in his vigorous, mental health as compared with La Fontaine's licentious indolence, and in working the same lode.

As a moralist, and in comparison with the French masters in that regard, Tennyson has much of the delicate faculty of observation of the suppressed emotions and passions of men and women, which vivifies the prose of La Bruyère.

In his subjects and his treatment of them, Tennyson is the very high priest of "Divinest Melancholy"; and in that particular, whatever be the cause, whether it lies in the imperfect digestion of his generation or in its overwrought nervous powers, he is emphatically the poet of his age, of its thought, and emotions. He has only to touch the chords, and humanity mysteriously grieves like a tender-hearted setter under the magic of a nocturne on the piano.

Politically, Tennyson would appear to be an aristocratic liberal; that is, a man who assumes to be above the people rather than of them; who would not the less scorn to add a feather to their weights in running the race of life; but who, at the same time, has an amiable contempt for the servility, treachery, and dishonesty which are more than likely to be qualities inherent in poverty, whether handicapped or not by ignorance or servile origin. And in any event, *ex officio* every poet should be something of a tory.

For the same reason, a poet should, for his profession's sake, belong to the more archaic church. The ceilings of the would-be philosophical temple of Protestantism have too white-washed and forbidding a look to invite the muses to kneel therein. But we have no right to expect that a man born in an English rectory should escape the prejudices which are the *lares* haunting its hearthstones.

To me, "Queen Mary," whether regarded as a poem or a drama, is a very uncomfortable production. There is an *aura* of chilliness running through the entire subject. There is but one cheery moment or word to rest upon; and that is where "Robin came and kissed me milking the cow."

Wives who suffer as did Mary are by no means uncommon; and in a social point of view, to say the least of it, it was rather ungallant of the Laureate, in his eagerness to strike a blow for his island's church, to hit out at a poor, visionary old maid making a loveless and fruitless marriage. Whenever rubi-

cund and wheezy Anglican ecclesiasticism feels, as punishment for its good living, an extra twinge of rheumatic gout in its joints, it has frightful visions of the Armada and the Spanish Inquisition; and groans about thumb-screws and racks.

"The Cup," as a drama, has, I believe, had more stage success than either Harold or Mary, and has bits here and there in the poet's happiest manner The incident is taken from Plutarch's "Amatoria" (repeated in Polyænus). I remember seeing it made into a story with a French *mise en scène*, published in "Friendship's Offering" for 1839, an annual to preceding years of which Tennyson had contributed. The subject appears also to have been selected by Jean de Hays, a French dramatist, at the close of the sixteenth century, for his "Cammate."

As each of Tennyson's plays has been produced on the stage, there has been a buzzing sub-murmur of critics that there was only a *succès d'estime*, if not an absolute failure. Had there been an out-and-out failure, it would only have been what might have been expected. The poet is not versed in stage business, as is Boucicault, and such knowledge is absolutely essential to the composion, nowadays, of a successful stage drama. Had the rectory lad improved his time properly from, say, 1830 to 1840, in lounging in the green-rooms and posing in the side-scenes, jostling scene shifters and shawling *soubrettes*, and taking thespian parties to supper orgies, instead of sitting prig-

gishly in his darling room and posing as Miss Alfred, his training would now stand him in good service.

But a day may come when the public familiar with the text of his plays will enjoy them on representation. Be it remembered that "The Cid" had detractors whose opinions were weighty; and that Molière's wittiest lines took time to impress.

The telegraph tells us that Tennyson's prose drama, "The Promise of May," is a failure; and also that the Most Noble the Marquess of Queensberry arose and protested against the travesty in the play of the modern dogmas concerning free thought, and left the house. One is carried back to the days of Louis Quatorze, and to the noble cavaliers who then crowded the stage, and abused the dramatists of that glittering time. What the deuce has a noble marquess to do with free thought, anyway? A coronet is about as handy a thing to have on in a revolution in politics or religion as a stove-pipe hat in an Irish shindy. How much more appreciative a critic would Her Grace Kitty of the ducal Queensberrys have been—Prior's Kitty—Gay's Kitty—who stood stoutly up for "The Beggar's Opera," and nursed the sick poet in his disgrace when royalty itself turned censor—Walpole's Kitty—could she have sat in a box and patted her pretty hands![1]

[1] One paper maliciously suggests that noble critic's dinner habits are such as to render it advisable that he attend only *matinée* performances.

Tennyson's fame has brought him one frightful infliction, in the persistent intrusion upon his time and acquaintance of lion-hunting tourists; and it is even murmured that there is a class of travelling Americans especially guilty in that way.

Hawthorne set Americans an example in that regard which should have been accepted. Now, if there was an American who would have represented our nation gracefully in the poet's eyes, it would have been Hawthorne; if any American could have been sure of a welcome, it was Hawthorne; and yet he contented himself with a good look at the Englishman in a public assembly. There might be a remedy for the evil, pacifying all parties. The poet might select a tall young man from the rising generation—some Maudle or Postlethwaite—who would not cloy with being stared at (and there are young bards to whom notoriety is *so* sweet!) to play the part of the veteran's double, and be shown as the actual incumbent of the laureateship. Of course, the shadow would have to prune his diction so as not to ruin Tennyson's reputation; but such discipline might be a great benefit in years to come.

Tennyson has, as a fact, founded no school. His grammatical methods, his fashions of prosody, his shades of mannerism, have all been imitated, for all had the seed; but the revolution in science, over the infancy of which Tennyson has been a watchful sentinel, and the broadening of the field of culture, the new aims which are to be sought, and the new foes which are

to be vanquished, render it necessary that "the foremost files of time," in which Tennyson has so long served as a grenadier, be filled up with young recruits armed with new weapons; and that the veterans who survive be left to do simple garrison duty over the spoils already captured.

Tennyson has lived a brilliant and complete literary life. We hope he may be spared to us as long as was Fontenelle to the Frenchmen; that he will see an international copyright in smooth working order; that he will make a fortune out of his books, every stanza bringing him a one-carat diamond; and that he will be peremptorily summoned to the House of Lords before "that venerable bulwark" is smashed to flinders by the artillery of "Free Thought." What a pang strikes the hearts of us—

> "With tonsured heads in middle age forlorn"—

when a master of our day passes away! How many are there of us who have read a fresh novel with any intensity since Thackeray fell asleep? People of the glaring, impertinent generation coming in and treading on our kibes may have their new fiction, new poems, and new philosophy; but we will none of them.

The generation which commenced "when classic Canning died" is closing; the men who amused and instructed it are, with some few exceptions, gone. Macaulay, Thackeray, Dickens, Longfellow, Dr. Newman, Carlyle, Mrs. Browning, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope are dead. If a few like Manning, Gladstone,

and Tennyson still remain with us, "yet is their strength, labor and sorrow."

There is no easy transition or succession from one generation to another. There is always a moral chasm intervening. The coming race may admire Tennyson; but he will not be their representative poet. His prides, his sympathies, his affections, his politics, his beliefs, will be archaisms to their taste. There are poets, possessors of some power and authority in our reading world, who may reign after him; but it will be as a new dynasty, and not by regular succession.

It will be a bad index of the morality of the next age if the band of "fleshly" bards who have already glided into popularity maintain their ground permanently. They are as foreign to the Laureate in temperament and morals as were the authors of the days of Charles II. to Milton. The clef to which the Laureate has at all times set his notes has been one of honest morality or honest remorse. He has sung either the miseries that attend as sequences to impossible or disappointed love in self-reverencing natures, or the happiness which honestly comes from gratification; but he has not dallied over description of the actual orgasms of passion. Love is present in all his verses; but it is hidden under the soil, like the dead man's head in the Pot of Basil. It is the force behind the emotion—not the ultimate object to be reached. But with the school I speak of, the delirium is the normal state of the pulse; and poetry would seem to be

merely one long, gloating chant of tyrannic and slobbering sensuality, that suggests the turgid visions of an insane retreat, and the propriety of prompt exhibition of a strong dose of bromide to the fevered or epileptic versifier.[1]

What Tennyson thinks of that sort of poetico-sexual Katzenjammer may be gathered from the fact that he makes Lucretius speed his departure out of life when he discovers, or fancies that he discovers, what a degraded phenomenon it is, under given conditions.

I have suggested that Tennyson closes a poetic generation. He has been in sympathy with every great poet, from Dante downward. He is, as it were, the end of the Renaissance. After all, there is only a difference of degree, of intensity of knowledge, between,

[1] We may admit, with Lucretius (or Walt Whitman, who seems to preach the dogma as a marvellous novelty), that virility (or sexuality) is the mainspring of human intelligence, as it is of organic life; but granting it such dignity as force or power, like all power-yielding engines, its proper place is down cellar. There is no artistic need that it should be forever prancing through our literature like a Black Hawk stallion through the crowded streets of a city, instead of being modestly hobbled in its paddock.

Nor is it requisite that our poetic properties should in the main consist of liturgies to be sung in the worship of some western-world-conceived Lingam and Yoni; nor that, after European civilization has kept in stock for twenty-five centuries a moderate amount of blushes, it should fling away Penelope's veil altogether. Neither the polished Gallus (or is it Cato?) in his sugary lines to Lydia, nor Ariosto in his *coglionerie*, ventured, in itemizing the graces of beauty, to hit below the belt; but these late rhythmic convulsionists find it wise to bring into focus, at any and all times, "the grand, cool flanks," and adjacent anatomical regions.

say, Petrarch, Erasmus, Bentley, Dr. Johnson, Porson, and Dr. Arnold. All belong to the same order of thought, used the same materials—that is to say, they rescued the fragments of Greek civilization and letters, and worked them into western culture. Those materials, so far as the workmen are concerned, are exhausted. There is little or nothing of them that is not being manipulated at third or fourth hands. There must be details told off to go out into the forests, like Homer's Achaians, for new fuel. The precious metals of the Greek revival of letters have been all melted down and thoroughly mixed. The old plate of Asiatic thought must now go into the pot.

Tennyson felt the need of being in full sympathy with the scholarship of his day, and attained it. But the new poet, the possible worthy successor of Tennyson, must not rest with Virgil and Theocritus, Dante and Shakspere, as his masters and guides. He must go back to the cradle of the world, peradventure, to find there, not models, but mysterious metaphysical forces, wherewith to vivify his verse. This new poet, whoever he be, this Iopas to come after the Phemios of Her Majesty Victoria's court, must, in any event, as part of his poetic task, learn to clothe the present aridity of science in graceful garb. He must be a Lucretius to the Memmii of the next race.

How he will work, what elements he will employ, what emotions invoke, we of this age cannot declare, any more than Coleridge could have foretold the success and glory of Tennyson.

NOTE.—Now that Mr. Fletcher and his collaborateurs have published a new edition of Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, there is no longer any necessity of referring the reader to magazine articles. Some of them have a merit apart from the subject. Notably, the article by "D. R., a Lincolnshire Rector" (Macmillan's, 1874), said to be the Rev. Drummond Rawnsley, a connection of both the Tennyson and Franklin families, and a poet himself. It may be proper to call the reader's attention to the letters by the first wife of Captain Franklin, who died in 1825, to Miss Mitford, both before her marriage to the great sailor and afterwards, as evidence of the cultured character of those Lincolnshire villages.

The only books that it is necessary here to refer readers to (more for the sake of acknowledging my obligation to them than anything else) are "Alfred Tennyson, his Life and Works," by Walter E. Wace, Edinburgh, 1881 (could this gentleman be of the same family with the author of "Brut"?); and "Tennysoniana," by R. H. Shepherd, 2nd edition, 1879. To those who wish to gain some idea of the bibliography of our poet, both or either of the volumes will render a satisfactory service.